

February 27, 2019

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 2051

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer,

As leading academic researchers who work to build evidence for policies to reduce firearm violence and suicide, we write in support of H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019 and S. 42, the Background Check Expansion Act.

We know that successful implementation of existing or expanded firearm prohibitions in federal or state law depends on having a background check on all firearm transfers. Current federal law only requires a background check when a firearm is purchased from a licensed firearms dealer, not when a firearm is purchased from a private, unlicensed seller. If we continue to allow prohibited purchasers to obtain firearms through private sales without a background check, the risk of firearm misuse will threaten public safety. We respect the importance of allowing states to enact laws that align with the values of their voters. However, research has demonstrated that inconsistent implementation of background checks across states and incomplete enforcement within states reduces the value of the legislation and results in more deaths. This life-saving tool must be truly comprehensive.

Background checks are the foundation of all policies designed to keep guns away from high-risk individuals. New and existing firearm prohibitions cannot be fully enforced without a background check on all gun sales. In 2017, there were nearly 40,000 gun deaths in the United States -- over 100 every day, on average. Often lost in those numbers is the profound role of firearms in suicide. Nearly two-thirds of all American gun deaths are suicides and more than half of all American suicide deaths are gun deaths. Fortunately, decades of research has demonstrated that implementation of universal background checks at the state level is associated with lower suicide rates. H.R. 8 thus represents a chance to save many American lives. In order to begin to ameliorate the public health crisis of gun-related violence and suicide, Congress should quickly pass this critical piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

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